

**"Mapping Great Lakes Identity: Past, Present, & Future"**  
**February 16-17, 2001**  
**Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center**  
**Michigan State University**  
**East Lansing, MI**

Conference Report

**Executive Summary**

**What:** Center for Great Lakes Culture, "Mapping Great Lakes Identity: Past, Present, & Future"

**Who:** 75 participants from educational, museum, arts, community service, postsecondary, and library organizations and institutions in the Great Lakes region.

**Where:** Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center, East Lansing, Michigan.

**When:** February 16-17, 2001

**Sponsors:** Steering Committee, Center for Great Lakes Culture; College of Arts & Letters, Michigan State University; National Endowment for the Humanities.

**Funding, Support for Conference:** Grants from National Endowment for the Humanities; units of Michigan State University.

This conference brought together professional, academic, and independent scholars, folklorists, writers, social scientists, humanists, researchers, and public intellectuals for two days of sessions designed to identify significant themes and constituencies in Great Lakes culture, and to articulate a strategy for the Center's development. The Center's website provides up-to-date information:

<http://www.greatlakes.msu.edu>

The event is a turning point in the planning process for the Center, which received a regional humanities center planning grant and considerable support from MSU's College of Arts & Letters, to launch the Center in late 2000.

**Detailed Conference Description**

**Conference Objectives**

The Center's NEH planning grant proposal specifies that the Center will hold a regional symposium to "explore the study of the region as a problem, share various ways in which the region's culture can be examined, identify possible future discipline and cross-discipline activities for the Center, identify and develop strategies for addressing preservation needs, and help set the public agenda for the Center and the field."

**Participants and Presenters**

*Participant Selection:* Participants in the Conference were identified from meeting notes and contacts gathered from across the region by the Center Steering Committee from the Center's regional advisors, faculty advisors, and interested members of the public. The resulting list encompassed a full range of professionals, scholars, public intellectuals, heritage and cultural organizations, and educational institutions. A list of participants is appended to this report.

*Presenters:* Because the conference was designed as a symposium that emphasized breakout sessions and brainstorming for the Center's agenda, the number of presentations was kept to a few targeted sessions intended to stimulate productive discussions in the breakout sessions. The keynote speaker, Prof. Michael Conzen of the University of Chicago, addressed the Center's central challenge— to locate and describe any distinctive culture in the Great Lakes region. Other presenters included Dr. Rick

Knupfer, a writer and director of the Michigan Humanities Council, and the noted writer, Mr. Richard Ford, who debated the nature of regionalism; Mr. Lee Murdock, Great Lakes storyteller, poet, and singer; and Joe VanderMeulen, of the Land Information Access Association, who demonstrated new media models of mapping and describing cultural geography with the aid of GPS programming.

### **Program**

The program can be downloaded from:

<http://www.greatlakes.msu.edu>

The Conference divided into 2 one-day sessions. On the first day, Feb. 16, the group considered matters of definition:

- Prof. Michael Conzen opened the conference with an illustrated talk addressing the question, "Have the Great Lakes produced a distinctive cultural region?" He concluded that although the region, like other regions in the United States, has been a blend of urban, economic, demographic, maritime, and environmental influences, its distinctiveness can be found precisely in those unique features. The Great Lakes drainage basin, he pointed out, can be seen as the defining characteristic – the lakes themselves produced native and later migrant populations whose lifeways emerged in and along the lakes, rivers, and streams extending out from across the Lakes region. With the onset of industrialization, later migrations across the region carried these lifeways farther into the region's cities and hinterlands, interacting with rural folk, agricultural cycles, and varied local environments. Excerpts and a transcript of Prof. Conzen's talk may be found at the Center's conference web site.
- The participants then broke into several small groups to build on ideas offered by Prof. Conzen. Notetakers attended these sessions, which were led by at least one member of the Center steering committee, if available. The central questions they discussed: what exactly are we mapping, and how do we address issues of scholars being willing to engage in regional studies? What is important about the scholarly work of regional studies? How do we identify, map and inventory regional resources? How do we connect scholars and their work with the public? What are the challenges of doing regional studies work, and how might those challenges be addressed? See the summary section of the report for outcomes of these meetings.
- In *A Conversation on Place, Identity and Regionalism*, hosted by Wendy Wilkins, Dean of the MSU College of Arts and Letters, Rick Knupfer and Richard Ford discussed, and at times debated, the nature of regional identities. Ford argued that regionalism has frequently been a destructive force in American culture, as it tends to weaken the needed mobility and independence of the artistic intellect by grounding the latter in narrow and local prejudices. Knupfer argued that the overlays of regional identities through time have enlivened and in some cases liberated cultural creativity as they produced new cultural patterns. The debate prompted a number of comments from the audience, that spilled over into the following sessions.
- Small group discussions then formed around the distinctive "gatherings" organizations that the Center is fostering. Notetakers again served the groups, which discussed regional resource inventories, K12 curricular initiatives, networking issues, research and development possibilities, and future Center activities to promote the various gatherings. The gatherings represented in these small groups included public history; vernacular architecture; linguistics and expressive culture; labor history; native american culture. See the summary section of the report for outcomes of these meetings.

- A reception and dinner, featuring Great Lakes songs and stories by Lee Murdock, plus a welcome by Peter McPherson, president of Michigan State University.

*Day two (Feb. 17):* The participants considered matters of implementation and strategy development for the Center.

- In *Public Participation in Mapping Community Assets*, Joe VanderMeulen of the Land Information Access Center demonstrated and discussed new GPS-based software that permits local cultural and commercial organizations to locate and map historic buildings, landmark sites, zoning districts for cultural preservation, and information resources in communities. The program's database not only promotes public involvement in land use planning, it also enables nonprofit organizations to plan heritage corridors and cultural events.
- Awards ceremony. The best web site (The Great Lakes Information Network, hosted by the Great Lakes Commission, <http://www.glin.net>); best exhibition on Great Lakes regional culture (Arts Midwest Arts Midwest, Ohio Arts Council, and the Columbus Museum of Art for the exhibition, "Illusions of Eden: Visions of the American Heartland"). Best book (Michael McNally, *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Breakout sessions and a plenary summary session followed, where participants, randomly formed into new small groups, worked with a set of Center priorities culled from the previous morning's small group meetings and discussed the results in general session. Those priorities describe the Center's functions as networking, resource development, education and outreach, best practices. See summary section of the report for outcomes.

### **Conference Outcomes Summary**

#### ***Strategic Priorities and Activities for the Center***

The participants agreed that the Center – both in its focal role as a Center for research and education on Great Lakes culture and in its structure, with operations through unique "gatherings" of multidisciplinary communities – should operate from several central premises:

1. The Great Lakes region is founded on waterways and industries that link subregions and cultures that shift with migratory, economic, and environmental changes over time. Although the conventional debate over region as a place or a process will never be fully resolved, the Center will engage the argument upon the assumption that generations and cultures do define themselves within physical spaces and refer to their place in time within the context of influential geographical and economic conditions.
2. Scholarship and public education about the region is of relatively recent origin, and involves a recombination and rethinking of existing literatures, collections, and research agendas.
3. The CGLC's central mission will involve rediscovery, integration, and research to recover the region's distinctive history and culture.

The participants identified the following core functions of the center:

1. Networking. The Center will be the central network for scholars, teachers, writers, public intellectuals, and researchers seeking contact and interaction on Great Lakes Culture. Specifically, this means:
  - a. constructing an online contact directory and referral service for researchers, teachers, and writers with a broad regional subject or impact. The directory will enable interested users to identify and locate people working on the region's culture and history.

- b. sponsoring conferences and public programming that emphasize and develop a generic, regional constituency through lectures, presentations, symposia, and projects.
    - c. establishing and developing online communications tools that encourage and produce research, teaching, and outreach-oriented communities of participants.
  2. Clearinghouse. The Center will create and publish resource inventories in the multidisciplinary "gatherings" fields and in the general field of Great Lakes culture and history. The resource inventories will concentrate on locating, classifying, and making accessible finding aids, specific collections, curricula, and public programs. The Center will also provide online tools, web space, design and programming assistance, and links for relevant programs and projects at partner institutions across the region.
  3. Coordination, Collaboration, & Sponsorship. The Center will work across institutions, states, and international borders to build and sponsor joint programs and partnerships in Great Lakes culture and history:
    - a. continuing and refining the Fellowships program begun during the planning phase of the Center. The program will continue to encourage formal research and publication, and will also include public intellectuals, independent scholars, and graduate assistantships in the field.
    - b. continuing and refining the Awards program, to include theses, musical productions, student competitions, and folklore.
    - c. create partnerships with state tourism and transportation agencies to support the establishment of heritage corridors and public education projects at major tourist crossroads, rest areas, and public information sites in the region.
    - d. provide grant-writing assistance and resources for project developers.
    - e. use a Traveling Fellows program to rotate Center Fellows through partner cultural and educational institutions.
  4. Education & Outreach. Through several regional programs, the Center will use a variety of media and events to educate and reach diverse audiences about the history and culture of the Great Lakes region, and thereby serve as intermediary between scholars and the public:
    - a. identify, publicize, and link existing local K12 curricula across the region.
    - b. encourage the creation of new K12 curricula that are broadly consistent with state standards in the social sciences and arts. To this end, the Center will work with teachers, libraries, humanities councils, and professional educators to locate and make available the building blocks of such curricula: images, sound, film, and essential documents. The Center will then assist educators with planning and implementing programs that meet district or state standards.
    - c. create an accreditation program of postsecondary courses in Great Lakes studies at institutions across the region.
    - d. connect school and community through heritage programs addressing diverse audiences.
    - e. produce a periodic Great Lakes Folk Festival.
    - f. sponsor a permanent regional traveling exhibit, with associated online components, on regional studies and Great Lakes heritage.

5. Cultural Cartography. The Center's research, publication, and disciplinary programs will seek to identify, describe, and publish the region's culture, heritage, history, and art. This process of mapping regional culture will not only track ongoing changes in its culture, but will also make regional studies itself an important Center activity. The cornerstone of this function is the Center's unique "gatherings" program, which draws scholars and humanists from many disciplines and interests into satellite networks that produce programs and develop regional resources:
  - a. regional studies: support colloquia, publications in print and online, and international linkages to programs on the discipline of regional studies.
  - b. "gatherings": provide startup resources, online tools, and library assistance to groups certified by the Center as official Center "gatherings".

### ***Gatherings Reports and Findings***

An important element of the conference was the opportunity for interdisciplinary teams of scholars, teachers, and public humanists to meet and develop initial plans for "gatherings" in subjects of interest. All of the groups exchanged ideas for contacts and resources that will be shared via the CGLC's interest-group listservs, and all shared the general set of priorities outlined in the five points above. Here is a summary of the meetings held at the conference:

1. Public History: Emphasis on public, community-based programming that connects scholars and public, nonacademic audiences and resources. The Center should:
  - DO public work: identify underutilized materials; fund fellows and community-based scholars to do research; provide research to local community, integrate it into CGLC archive; community collecting efforts (oral histories, preservation needs).
  - FIND models: esp. K12 curricular materials that link to state standards. Hire grad assistants to locate, draw up model plans, work with districts and state ed. agencies to adapt to local needs.
  - STAY in contact: use the CGLC to create online and face-to-face networks and conferences in regional public history;
  - CREATE partnerships: bring together non-traditional organizations in a public historical network (archives, museum, humanities councils);
  - SPREAD information: training and skills development for public history agencies, with emphasis on regional content: helping docents, volunteers, as well as professionals, incorporate regional materials and knowledge into presentations, programs, planning.
  - MAKE joint programs: create a regional consortium of museums, historical centers, for joint exhibits and training programs;
  - EXCHANGE info/ideas on equal footing
2. Vernacular Architecture/Heritage Landscapes:
  - Group to appoint a committee to develop inventory of physical resources, existing organizations, community needs, and build a conference around identified topics.
  - Target specific existing databases and networks of information on heritage tourism, highway guides, state heritage surveys.
  - Push scholarship beyond existing confines of academy, to raise the level of public literacy about heritage landscapes– use content "feeds" to broadcast media, best practices standards for commercial guides, create a regional cultural atlas on the Canadian model.

- Use the CGLC to coordinate, collect, disseminate via new media, print, sponsor fellows and exchanges.
3. Expressive Culture: This group sought to create a beginning list of relevant projects underway in the region and to make the initial contacts that can be continued via a folklorist or expressive culture listserv and related web site. The group also considered what directions the CGLC should take, and concluded with an emphasis on its role as network center, coordinator and “convener” of resources. For example, providing a listing of Midwest resources (on web), a regional database of food festivals, cultural directories, a referral service, and conferences so that people across the disciplines comprehended by “expressive culture” can meet. The group also agreed that the Center should change its title, to the Center for Great Lakes Culture s, to emphasize the variability within the Great Lakes region.
  4. “Linguistics” and Identity: Social and Geographical Boundaries: Can we share expertise? (a) people should identify fields of expertise. For example, linguists may need statistical information with regard to immigration, history and the like (b) resources (c) interpretation of our data.
    - Can the center advertise our projects? (a) we would like statements of academic projects, graduate student projects so that networking may take place (b) basic reading lists.
    - K-12 initiatives (a) discussion concerning a gathering--departments of education at MSU (universities), public school administration and linguists (b) how can we connect with the public school system and teach the role of dialects?
    - Organize a multi-linked web page and data bank (audio) (a) DARE (b) KSU–Kansas State University has tapes related to actors training for theater (c) LANCS–Linguistic Atlas of North Central States.
    - Grant-writing assistance
    - Festival and displays. Language festival with story tellers, and different dialect speakers?
  5. Labor History: The group agreed that the main focus was not just “labor history” but the history and culture of working people. Importance of rural in industrial history (i.e., industry has always been located in the countryside and small towns as well as major urban areas). Should organize a roundtable session on regional labor history at the North American Labor History Conference (Oct. 2001); the group discussed briefly whether / how the CGLC’s efforts in this area would articulate with the new Labor and Working Class Historical Association (LAWCHA). The conversation turned to the question of what the CGLC can do for labor historians in the region:
    - inventory of regional archives and resources, possibly linking web page to existing resources;
    - act as clearinghouse for public history projects to connect them with scholars;
    - possibly provide scholarly background for the Auto National Heritage Area (ANHA);
    - sponsor conference for Industrial Heritage Area folks (ANHA, Iron Range, Pullman);
    - provide linkage between state efforts to develop labor history curriculum for schools;
    - identify projects that need to be done (like “books that haven’t been written” ) in order to prompt new research;

## **Appendix**

### I. Participants

1. Arnold Alanen, University of Wisconsin – Madison
2. John Beck, Michigan State University
3. Phil Bellfy, Michigan State University
4. Erica Benson, Michigan State University
5. Richard Brandenburg, Michigan State University
6. Ana Cardona, Michigan Department of Education
7. Ina Carpenter, Indiana University
8. Sandra Clark, Michigan Historical Center
9. Michael Conzen, University of Chicago
10. Tim Crumrin, Conner Prairie Museum
11. Amy DeRogatis, Michigan State University
12. Jeanne Drewes, Michigan State University
13. Walter Edwards, Wayne State University
14. Susan Eleuterio, Illinois Arts Council
15. Phyllis Ellin, Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor Commission
16. Betsy Evans, Michigan State University
17. Andrew Farry, Michigan State University
18. Jefferson Faye, Michigan State University
19. Lisa Fine, Michigan State University
20. Beverly Flanigan, Ohio University
21. Richard Ford, Speaker
22. David Fraher, Arts Midwest
23. Bob Gates, Kentucky Folklife Program
24. Charlie Greenleaf, Michigan State University
25. Tobias Higbie, Newberry Library
26. Fred Honhart, Michigan State University
27. Robert Huggett, Michigan State University
28. Jamila Jones, Michigan State University
29. Susan Krouse, Michigan State University
30. William Lockwood, University of Michigan
31. Yvonne Lockwood, Michigan State University
32. Christine Manninen, Great Lakes Information Network
33. Gary Manson, Michigan State University
34. Peter McPherson, Michigan State University
35. Lesley Milroy, University of Michigan
36. Sachie Miyazaki, Michigan State University

37. Lee Murdock, Performer
38. Lucy Murphy, Ohio State University, Newark
39. Trudy Nicks, Royal Ontario Museum
40. Jodie O'Gorman, Michigan State University
41. Brenda Parolini, Michigan State University
42. Bartek Plichta, Michigan State University
43. Dennis Preston, Michigan State University
44. Stephen Rachman, Michigan State University
45. Oliver Ragsdale, Arts League of Michigan
46. Donald Richan, Queen's University
47. Diana Rivera, Michigan State University
48. Ruby Rogers, Cincinnati Museum Center
49. Paula Rosinski, Michigan State University
50. Sissel Schroeder, University of Wisconsin
51. Beth Lee Simon, Indiana University
52. Susan Sleeper-Smith, Michigan State University
53. Robert Stearns, Arts Midwest
54. Athena Trentin, Michigan State University
55. Joe VanderMeulen, Land Information Access Association
56. Kenneth Vrana, Center for Maritime & Underwater Resource Management
57. Kenneth Waltzer, Michigan State University
58. Michael Ann Williams, Western Kentucky

#### II. Steering Committee Members

1. Wendy Wilkins, Dean, College of Arts & Letters, MSU
2. C. Kurt Dewhurst, Director, CGLC and MSU Museum
3. Walter R. Knupfer, Executive Director, Michigan Humanities Council
4. Patrick McGoneghy, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, College of Arts & Letters, MSU
5. Lynne Goldstein, Professor and Chair, Department of Anthropology, MSU
6. Peter Berg, Head, Special Collections, MSU Libraries
7. Gail Vander Stoep, Associate Professor, Park, Recreation, and Tourism Resources, MSU
8. Peter B. Knupfer, Associate Professor, Associate Director, MATRIX: Center for the Humane Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences Online, MSU

#### III. Regional Advisors: for a complete listing, visit:

<http://www.greatlakes.msu.edu/ra.cfm>

#### IV. MSU Faculty Advisors: for a complete listing, visit:

<http://www.greatlakes.msu.edu/fa.cfm>

V. *Conference materials:* Documents, the program, and images may be found at the Center's website, <http://www.greatlakes.msu.edu>. A listserv for participants has also been launched for postconference evaluations and discussion.